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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [ECON](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: MARCH 10 EXECUTIVE STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING:  
FOCUS ON SERVICES

(U) Classified by Ambassador Khalilzad, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The March 10 Executive Steering Committee (ESC) of the Baghdad Security Plan had a strong focus on basics services, notably pharmaceuticals and electricity, as well as a more assessments-based security update. Other topics included returning internally displaced persons (IDPs) and media. There is increasing turnout on the Iraqi side for these meetings, including by staff of the Prime Minister's Office, as well as a growing professionalism of the presentations. Unfortunately, DPM Barham Salih again was absent from the meeting, since he is in Jordan with President Talabani. Vice President Adel Abdul-Mahdi was on pilgrimage to Karbala for Arba,een. It is clear that Chalabi is asserting more leadership in the BSP through his role in the Public Support Committee. End Summary.

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Security Update  
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¶2. (C) The PM began the meeting as in the past by calling on Lt Gen Abboud Kanbar for a security update, which Abboud provided in detail, but with more assessment and summary information than his previous briefings to the ESC. He touched on the VBIED problem and noted that an issue the military is grappling with is how to protect pilgrims better in the wake of the Hillah attack on March 6. He reported the continuing decline in numbers of kidnappings and extra judicial killings (EJK,s) but also the continued terrorist activity in Kharkh district. Abboud noted that a VBIED had been detected and detonated by a checkpoint in Doura and listed a number of other incidents involving VBIEDs. He explained that the number IDP returnees is growing, with some 300 families returning to Kharkh, 400 in Rusafa and almost 1600 families returning to the Baghdad suburbs. The military showed footage which had been aired on local TV of returning families in the suburbs, leading to a discussion of whether the ID 1 million returnee payments offered by the PM were sufficient, and how the distribution of payments could be improved.

¶3. (C) Abboud had the Baghdad traffic director describe efforts to un-block various streets and remove the t-wall barriers in front of the headquarters of the political parties and other public buildings. He listed a number of markets that had been secured as well as warehouses belonging to the Amanat which contained goods important for the BSP. He noted that a large number of the terrorists who had been detained so far had already confessed, underscoring the need for quicker trials to keep the judicial process moving forward. He also called on the Popular Support Committee to do more to help returning IDPs. Abboud criticized the federal ministries in general for not supporting the Fardh al-Qanoon project more seriously, and called on the Baghdad city administration to help support his efforts to secure

markets by making better use of available parking lots. He announced his intent to focus on relieving traffic congestion in the city by re-opening 11 main roads that are presently largely blocked for security chokepoint purposes. Ten other main roads will be repaired as a pilot program. Overall as many as 90 roads in Baghdad have been blocked for security purposes

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Political Committee  
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14. (C) In the absence of VP Abdul-Mahdi, the Political Committee report was presented by former CoR member Hajem al-Hasani, who described his efforts to engage in a broader discussion with political leaders on ways to expedite national reconciliation.

15. (C) He cited the various drafts of a de-Baathification law and how he was trying to find a way consolidate the drafts. He pointed to the hydrocarbon law as a particularly important part of the reconciliation effort, saying he was consulting with the CoR to ensure that the law was passed quickly and by an overwhelming majority to show its broad support. He also cited the March 10 Neighbors, Conference as helping to contribute to the reconciliation process. PM Maliki mentioned that he wanted to see Iraq,s ambassadors engage in more active lobbying to promote awareness of the BSP after the Neighbors, Conference. National Security Adviser Rubaie queried the Baghdad governor if a way could not be found to appoint distinguished Sunnis as ex officio members of the Baghdad Provincial Council. The governor replied to general amusement that he had no idea which members of the Council were Sunni and which were Shia.

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Services  
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16. (C) DPM Zowbaie presented an update on services asking the Minister of Health to make a presentation on the ministry,s needs and calling on the Minister of Interior to focus on the problems the Health Ministry faced from infiltrations in its facilities protection service forces. The Minister of Health then outlined his concerns about security, saying it was more important to protect the pharmaceutical warehouses than delivery trucks since otherwise the staff of the warehouses would not be able to do their jobs. The Electricity Minister gave an extensive presentation on the plan to acquire solar-powered street lights, as well as discussing security problems at Bayji Refinery and the need to secure crude oil transport for Doura refinery. He told the ministers that he will begin participating in a joint Iraqi-CF working group to better coordinate repairs to electrical infrastructure. Interior Minister Bolani noted that the problems with Bayji were more complex than security but went deeper into the whole issue of corruption resulting from theft of crude oil as well as refined product. DPM Zawbaie called for a greater focus on providing power to BIAP airport which has not had reliable power for months. The Interior Minister asserted that the time was right to address electricity theft and that he had sufficient forces available to do so, to which the Electricity Minister replied that the problem was so ingrained that it would require concerted efforts to address since the power thieves had constructed their own network of power lines to draw off power from the distribution points.

17. (C) The mayor of Baghdad launched into an extremely lengthy presentation of various infrastructure projects he had been carrying out, overall the city had some 1000 projects of varying scope underway. He highlighted that in Sadr City there was a particular set of problems with illegal buildings on easements and other land needed for infrastructure use. These illegal structures were a major impediment to sorting out the infrastructure problems in Sadr City and required sensitive political solutions.

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Media  
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18. (C) On Media Committee issues there was a discussion of how to present the IDP returnee situation in the best possible light, highlighting what the government was doing without creating unrealistic expectations. Committee Chair Majid called on the security forces to provide actual footage of weapons seized in illegal caches as well as material on detainees that could be aired so that the populace had a better picture ) literally ) of the accomplishments of the FAQ program. Majid also talked about how to do a better job with the regional Arab TV stations, a recurring theme in ESC discussions. General Petraeus assured the committee that Coalition Forces were able and willing to provide media material for airing as requested and also offered to rebuild the book market recently destroyed by a suicide bomber. The Minister of Health sought authorization to be allowed to discuss with media and NGOs the steep decline in numbers of EJK,s, which are now in the daily range of 5-10, vice the over 100 EJK,s showing up in morgues around the city only a few weeks ago. MoI Bulani disagreed and said that because MoH gives the media the total number of dead on a daily basis, the media will make the assumption that they were all killed due to sectarian violence and thus exacerbate the negative portrayal of security efforts in regional media. The Prosecutor General weighed in with a report on his efforts to accelerate the rate at which special commissions could do field investigations of detainees. He said that in as many as 50% of the cases of detainees there was insufficient evidence to hold them, and in fact they were being released. He added that his judges were reporting that in all cases there were reasonable grounds for suspicion, but that even where there was smoke, but no fire<sup>8</sup> high evidentiary standards were being maintained.

19. (C) Comment: The latest ESC reflected a further maturation of the Iraqi internal interagency process. The turnout by ministers and staff is increasing. Presentations are more focused ) with some exceptions ) and in general the discussions are more conducive to decision-making. While much work from the embassy side has gone into helping prepare the issues and agenda for these meetings, the process seems to be gradually gaining its own momentum, though it is clear that the momentum still results in extremely lengthy meetings with more digressions than might be wished for. Nevertheless, just as the FAQ is going better than many had feared, the ESC is gradually developing into a more coherent

decision-making and information exchange mechanism that should allow the PM to lead the interagency response. The fact that the Iraqis continue to place importance on the exchange with Coalition representatives is also to be noted. End Comment.

SPECKHARD